Pam.
Spiritualism

SPIRITUALISM AS RELATED TO THEOSOPHY

THE SUBSTANCE OF A LECTURE DELIVERED DURING THE CONVENTION OF THE THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY IN ENGLAND AND WALES ON THE 23rd of MAY, 1920, BY

A. P. SINNETT

LONDON
THEOSOPHICAL PUBLISHING HOUSE
9 ST. MARTIN'S STREET, W.C. 2
1920

Spiritualism as Related to Theosophy

THE subject of my address this evening is one of huge importance. Theosophy has a message for the world the significance of which cannot be overrated. Spiritualism, before our message was ready for delivery, had prepared the way for it by enabling millions to realize that beyond the change called death, human consciousness survived, under conditions that the physical senses could not cognize, but under conditions as real for those who pass on, as those around us here are real for us who have not yet passed on. Many influences conspired to impede the general acceptance of even the main conclusion reached by Spiritualistic methods. These could not but give rise to embarrassment and confusion, and the evil powers around us that some of us are enabled to discern in operation have been eager to stimulate distrust of the main conclusion by focussing public attention as far as possible on the minor, trivial and misleading communications coming through Spiritualist channels in great abundance. But the way in which millions of people in all civilized countries remain none the less firm in their conviction that they do get into touch through mediums with those they have loved in the earth life, ought to be more impressive for the multitude than, as yet, it is generally found to be. And as regards the discouraging experiences

that are often encountered by outsiders who attempt to investigate Spiritualism without any lofty motive to guide them, only by the help of occult knowledge of an advanced order can such experiences be entirely explained away. Meanwhile for vast numbers of earnest Spiritualists their experiences make them perfectly immune to the influence of ridicule or misrepresentation.

But while they are content to *know* what ordinary religious teachers told them, but left them in doubt about—that there is another life after this—some of them felt dissatisfied with the comfortless obscurity still, even for them, left hanging over the mysterious future lying beyond the happy realm in which they were quite sure those they had loved and lost were actually established for a time. Now, if all had gone well—if the original intention of the Divine Hierarchy had been successfully worked out by the human agency engaged in the task—I think the most cultured and thoughtful of Spiritualists would have come to thirst for a more scientific and philosophical interpretation of the next world, the future life and prospects of immortality beyond that again, than could be obtained by the resources so far at their disposal. And that thirst would have rendered them eager recipients of Theosophical teaching when it began to filter into the open world. But that eagerness was checked by the way in which some early attempts to set forth Theosophical teachings were coloured by grave misunderstandings concerning the normal course of human destiny beyond the change called death. There is indeed a normal course for Eastern races, which differs in some respects from that provided for Western races, and, as the Theosophical movement first took root in the East, some aspects of Western Spiritualism offended writers deeply imbued with

Eastern sympathies. So it came to pass that early exponents of the new teaching, set forth a view of Western Spiritualism that not only incensed those actually concerned with it but, for them, discredited Theosophical teaching altogether. They *knew* that the friends they were in touch with on the other side were, as a rule, the persons they had cared for in this life. They were quite well aware that appearances were sometimes deceptive, but when told that laws of Nature made it impossible they could ever be genuine, they knew that writers who proclaimed that view were ill-acquainted with the actual state of the facts.

Some of us can see now, how, by focussing attention on rare, unhealthy developments in Astral life, the Theosophical opponents of Spiritualism imagined these to be the conditions generally prevailing in that life. In a similar way a doctor specializing in the study of paralysis might come to believe that every one was bound to have a seizure sooner or later, so that the physical plane was an accursed region from which all should escape at the earliest possible moment.

In taking offence at the Theosophical blunder, Spiritualists made the mistake of disregarding the way in which theosophical teaching along other lines illuminated their own pathway. The next world, for those who get into touch with it through mediumship, is recognised as a variegated region, including conditions of suffering as well as of great happiness, and above all things is a region in which people who love one another on this plane of life, but are separated by death, are re-united in satisfying companionship. Such people, when friends still in life ask for information about the next world, can only describe what they see around them. They may know or feel that from their current

*

condition they will pass on eventually to higher conditions, but their view of the future is vague and misty. So Spiritualists ought to have suspected from the beginning that the new outburst of information, when Theosophy broke upon the world, would throw a flood of light on their own research. The wide range and coherence of the new story might have been suggestive for all students of human destiny and evolution. And as time went on, the Spiritualists, if only they could have been patient at first with our deplorable shortcomings, would have seen in our later interpretation of the Astral world, the answer to almost all the questions their own methods of research left unanswered.

Thus I have been struggling for years to bridge the chasm that has so long divided the two great divisions of super-physical explorers. That such a chasm should exist is absurd. For all imaginable reasons Theosophists and Spiritualists ought to be allies in combating Materialism, in reforming religious thought. Some of us *know* now, and all should see how reasonably they may believe, that the Masters of the Divine Hierarchy who instituted the Theosophical movement were equally concerned at a previous date, in setting the Spiritualist movement on foot. It was urgently needed at the time to combat Materialism, and did magnificent work in that direction. If all had gone well it would also have proved a broad highway leading up to its sequel—the Theosophical movement. The distribution of blame for its failure to prove this, is an ungracious undertaking that I shall not be further concerned with, but it is well worth our while as Theosophists to remember always that though the Ethics of Theosophy are unchangeable in their grand simplicity, our compre-

hension of the marvellously complex realms of Nature that lie beyond the reach of the physical senses, has been gradually expanding during the last thirty years, so that some earlier impressions gathered from the earlier books are now in need of careful revision. Thus we are now in a position to understand the highly variegated life of the Astral world in a way which brings us into much closer sympathy with the Spiritualists' conception of that world, while at the same time showing us how necessarily incomplete that conception must remain as long as it depends exclusively on communications received through ordinary mediumship. And Spiritualists would be drawn into much closer sympathy with ourselves if they would only pay attention to advanced Theosophical teaching concerning the Astral world and realize how that clears up all inconsistent testimony coming through ordinary mediumship, while fully supporting the Spiritualists' fundamental conclusion that the Astral world, whatever other attributes it may possess, is the scene of happy re-unions of those who love one another after they are set free for a time from the conditions of the earth life.

That supremely important discovery is the secret of the magnificent success of the Spiritualist movement throughout the world. Its adherents are estimated to number twenty millions. Certainly many millions are positively sure that they have had touch with beloved ones on the other side. And the weight of their evidence in favour of believing in the survival of personal consciousness after death has really influenced the attitude of mind of the civilized world to an extent that the clergy as a body have failed to

Meanwhile Spiritualism, with the lofty purposes that guided the Divine Hierarchy in starting it, became naturally

an object of attack for the numerous enemies of that Hierarchy busy amongst us. And thus it comes to pass that so many people who have not gone into the matter thoroughly are ready to believe the monstrously exaggerated stories concerning what are represented as dangers attending the methods of Spiritualism. Often people who have no personal knowledge in the matter will carelessly repeat reckless falsehoods to the effect that lunatic asylums are full of mediums who have been driven mad by the exercise of their profession, and of their dupes who have become obsessed by evil spirits. One might as well declare that religion drives people mad. Probably it has done so occasionally, but sane church-goers are in the majority, and as for the Spiritualists, though I have never heard of a definite case of insanity developed along that road, the discovery of a definite case if there is one would be of no relative importance. If there are " dangers " in Spiritualism, there is certainly much greater danger at present in crossing a London street, but for adequate reasons we all of us have to face that. So far as dangers in mediumship may be real, they ensue from what may be regarded as its misuse. When the motive guiding an appeal to a medium for help is dignified, *a fortiori* when it is prompted by love for some one on the other side with whom communication is sought, no harm can possibly ensue to either inquirer or medium. When motives are ignoble bad consequences are conceivable. And of course the Astral impostor must be guarded against in all cases. Gross imposture on the physical plane by sham-mediums is very much rarer than reckless assailants of Spiritualism imagine. Astral impostors pretending to be other than they really are, are probably more numerous than devout Spiritualists are inclined to

believe. But all experienced Spiritualists are alive to the importance of being careful about the identity of those on the other side with whom they come into touch.

Unhappily they do not as a rule appreciate the significance, as bearing on their own methods of research, of the detailed knowledge advanced Theosophists have now been able to obtain concerning the different sub-planes of the Astral world. These represent conditions so varied that they include those suggested by the terms Heaven and Hell. Beyond the highest Astral sub-planes, indeed there are doubtless realms to which the term Heaven more definitely applies, but while the lowest is nothing other than the real Hell of Nature, the highest are regions of sublime happiness and intellectual activity. That is why I think it rather unfortunate that some Theosophical writers describe the condition or region superior to the Astral world as the "Mental" plane. The earlier term, "Manasic," though of Sanscrit origin, is preferable just because it does not seem, to Western ears, to imply that it monopolizes intellectual attributes. The high levels of the Astral afford opportunity for the freest possible expansion of all that we of the physical plane mean when we talk of intellectual activity.

And the intermediate levels, or sub-planes, afford abundant opportunity for the fullest possible development of that happy Astral life which Spiritualists come into touch with, and early Theosophists so strangely ignored. On that vast region of the Astral world which we now recognise as the fourth great sub-division of that enormous realm (counting from the bottom upwards) all people of the ordinary type who have led decent lives, but are not enlightened aspirants for lofty spiritual progress on "The Path," find themselves

in congenial surroundings and, above all things, in companionship with those of their own type whom they care for and who have gone on before. It is fair to regard as the dominant key-note, so to speak, of the fourth sub-plane of the Astral the idea of re-union for those who love one another. The Spiritualists have firm hold of this idea when they talk about the "Summer Land," and early Theosophists lost sight of it, concentrating attention too exclusively on the ultimate necessity for re-incarnation as a gradual preparation for spiritual growth far beyond the temporary (however protracted) happiness of the fourth sub-plane. The Spiritualists, meanwhile, had not been able to realise the necessity for re-incarnation. They had not heard a word about it from their friends of the Summer Land. How could they? It does not take its departure from the Summer Land, and can only be perceived in operation for those whose powers of observation range over much higher levels. Theosophists, in a position to survey the whole programme of human evolution, know that good people of the ordinary type are, after all, advanced little more than half way along the path of ultimate progress marked out for them. They can only be imperfectly acquainted with the complete design, and they sail on through the period of happiness with those they care for on the fourth sub-plane, merely vaguely made aware of the probability that they will ultimately go higher, and quite content with that vague prospect. Spiritualists still on the earth plane might profit, if they would, by the wealth of superphysical knowledge accumulated now by those who have appreciated the Theosophical revelation, but one of the grievous consequences ensuing from the way they were offended by some Theosophical writings in the beginning,

is that they have failed to do this. So most of them continue still to resent the "doctrine" of re-incarnation, though for the more advanced students of occultism, they might as well deny the "doctrine" which deals with the circulation of blood in a human body. Re-incarnation is just as fundamental a principle of human evolution as the circulation of the blood in reference to physiology.

So now I have endeavoured to show what Theosophists (of the old-fashioned type) lose by ignoring Spiritualism; what Spiritualists lose—frankly a greater loss—by ignoring Theosophy. Many years ago, in 1884, I wrote—on the strength of the imperfect knowledge available for occult students of that date—a "Transaction" of the London Lodge on "Kamaloka," an Eastern term we had then been misled into using when attempting to follow the experiences of the human soul after death. I should be very far from recommending the article as a whole to Theosophical attention at the present date, but even then I was impressed with the importance of the idea it has been my main purpose this evening to emphasize. And I tried to show how, even in the light of the cramped and imperfect comprehension of Astral life which we then possessed, it "... will, I think, afford Theosophists a gratifying explanation of a good many experiences connected with spiritualism which the first brief sketches of the esoteric doctrine as bearing on this matter left in much obscurity. I call the explanation gratifying because, whether Spiritualists for the most part reject the teaching on which we rely, or whether, as I hope may be the case in progress of time, they accept it as embracing their own experiences and sweeping far beyond this, they are a body of inquirers for whom we cannot but feel ourselves attached by many bonds of sympathy.

Indeed, as contrasted with the outer world of Materialists and slaves of religious dogma, Theosophists and Spiritualists ought to be regarded as forming one body. Their disagreements are as between ourselves, and could hardly be understood by outsiders quite unconnected with any investigation of truth on the spiritual plane."

Those words are just as well appropriate to the present times as to that at which they were written thirty-six years ago. It is simply by reason of deplorable misunderstandings on both sides that those of us who are exempt from these have still to lament the absurdity of the widely-spread belief that Spiritualism and Theosophy are somehow, like oil and water, unsusceptible of amalgamation. I have endeavoured to show by mere reasoning the falsehood of that impression. From the point of view of knowledge, which I venture to claim as a not unnatural result of my long service to the Theosophical cause, I recognise the false impression as not merely false but ludicrous in its misdirection. Amongst those who belong to the Divine Hierarchy towards which we look up when we talk about the "Masters" who inaugurated the Theosophical Movement, there are no divisions of sympathy or opinion. In the clear light of perfect knowledge the Truth is visible to all. And yet on the highest levels of spiritual dignity that we like to think about there are varied lines of activity in which the great Masters specialize, to use our familiar phrase, and thus, while two of whom readers of Theosophical books have most often heard, do truly concern themselves especially with the progress of Theosophy, another especially watches over and sympathetically promotes the progress of Spiritualism, as he has done from the beginning of that grand development designed to arrest the poisonous growth

of disbelief in any future life beyond the delusive finality of physical death. The three great Masters of whom I am thinking, far from being in rivalry as regards the special work of each, are in absolute sympathy of purpose—in harmony of feeling like notes of music, though different, in perfect accord. That is the kind of Brotherhood which ours, if it were adequately illuminated, should resemble; and among all the varied groups of humanity around us there are none which ought more definitely to be blended together in a genuine Brotherhood of sympathetic co-operation than the two great groups concerned on this plane, with the task of encouraging aspiration towards higher ideals than those related merely to the physical life. We may rest definitely assured that the more successful we may be in establishing genuine brotherhood of feeling between Spiritualists and ourselves the better we shall be realizing on this plane the flawless harmony of feeling prevailing in connection with all such efforts in the Divine Hierarchy above.

P.S.—In order that the issue of this pamphlet might be delayed as little as possible, I prepared the above digest of my lecture in advance of its delivery; and I fairly well followed the lines I had laid down. But towards the close of the lecture I felt impelled to add an earnest appeal to the large audience I was addressing to bring the great power of their collective thought to bear upon the urgently desirable purpose of promoting harmony of feeling between Spiritualists and their material allies of the Theosophical movement. To that end it was desirable that they should make a careful study of all recent teaching concerning the

characteristics of the various Astral sub-divisions, a proper comprehension of which will at once reconcile Theosophists to Spiritualism, and enable Spiritualists to realize how Theosophy is a revelation illuminating their own research with a new light, and obviously the appointed sequel to the splendid gift of knowledge they contributed to the world in advance.

Printed in Great Britain by
UNWIN BROTHERS, LIMITED, THE GRESHAM PRESS, WOKING AND LONDON